

13 December 2006

Ruth Kelly
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Dear Secretary of State

THAMES GATEWAY BRIDGE PUBLIC INQUIRY

You have announced that the toll for the Dartford crossings is to be increased from £1 to £1.50 for cars using the crossings during the day subject to formal consultation on the Toll Order.

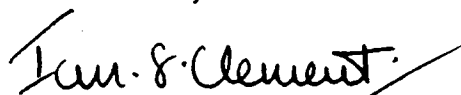
The level of tolls to cross the river was a major factor at the public inquiry into the Thames Gateway Bridge proposal held earlier this year and this significant change was not included in the assessment.

The differential toll on the Thames Gateway Bridge proposal was the most significant mechanism proposed for the control of traffic using the bridge and to achieve the schemes objectives. A discount was proposed for local residents combined with a relatively high toll to ensure that the bridge will not be used by large volumes of non-local traffic. The effect of tolls was so influential on the viability of the scheme that during the inquiry Transport for London (TfL) drastically reduced the size of the discount area to reduce traffic levels to an amount that, in their view, the local road network in Bexley could accommodate. Relative toll levels therefore have a very significant effect on the environmental impact of the bridge.

TfL's analysis did not take into account a 50% increase in the toll at the Dartford crossings or the proposals for tolls at the Blackwall Tunnel that are now being promoted. The effect of these proposals could significantly affect the traffic levels on the Thames Gateway Bridge and hence its environmental impact, particularly in Bexley which will have to accommodate the majority of the traffic south of the river.

I therefore consider that it is essential that the transport modelling is recalculated to reflect these changed circumstances, the impact re-assessed and the opportunity provided for people who will be affected to resubmit their evidence to the Inspectors. This work needs to be carried out before you and the Secretary of State for Transport are in a position to make the final decision on the Thames Gateway Bridge proposal.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Clement
Leader of Bexley Council